

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, NATO, BE

SUBJECT: HQ USEUCOM COLLOCATION

REF: USCINCEUR MSG 171628Z FEB 78 (ECJ5 02657)

1. WE HAD A LENGTHY DISCUSSION OF THE COLLOCATION ISSUE WITH THE BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY CHIEF OF NATO AFFAIRS, ERIK BAL, ON FEB. 22.

2. BELGIAN CONSIDERATION OF COLLOCATION IS AFFECTED BY THE PRIORITY THAT THE BELGIANS ASSIGN THE SUBJECT AND BY THE WAY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT ARRIVES AT DECISIONS ON COMPLI-CATED QUESTIONS. MR. BAL TOLD US (AND OUR EXPERIENCE CON-FIRMS IT) THAT THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT IS NOT EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS SEVERAL IMPORTANT POLICY QUESTIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY. HE RECOGNIZED AND UNDERSTOOD U.S. FRUSTRATIONS WITH THE SLOW-MOVING BELGIAN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, BUT SAID THAT THIS IS A POLITICAL FACT OF LIFE IN BELGIUM. AT THE MOMENT
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THE IMPROVED HAWK ISSUE AND THE RESULTING CRITICISM OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE'S MANAGEMENT OF BELGIAN DEFENSE POLICY HAS THE ATTENTION OF EVERYONE IN BELGIAN POLITICS CONCERNED WITH MILITARY ISSUES. WE KNOW THAT BELGIAN CONSIDERATION OF THE ER/RB WEAPON ISSUE HAS ALSO BECOME A MATTER OF URGENCY. THEREFORE, COLLOCATION AND SEVERAL OTHER IMPOR-TANT POLITICO-MILITARY ISSUES (E.G. JOINT STORAGE SITES,

AWACS) ARE PENDING. THERE HAS BEEN A CONVERGENCE OF DIFFICULT PROBLEMS FOR THE BELGIANS TO HANDLE WHICH ARE COMING TO A HEAD NOW.

3. IN THE BELGIAN ORDER OF PRIORITIES, COLLOCATION COMES IMMEDIATELY AFTER IMPROVED-HAWK AND THE ER/RB
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WEAPON. MR. BAL ASSERTED (AND AGAIN OUR EXPERIENCE CONFIRMS IT) THAT PRESSURE FOR QUICK DECISIONS UPON THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD RAISE THE SERIOUS RISK THAT A QUICK DECISION WOULD COME OUT NEGATIVE. IN THE SAME VEIN, MR. BAL TOLD US THAT ANY ATTEMPT TO RAISE THE PRESENT LEVEL OF DISCUSSIONS TO A HIGHER LEVEL RAN THE SAME RISK.

4. MR. BAL COMPARED THE BELGIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM, WHICH MUST TREAT POLITICO-MILITARY ISSUES, TO ELECTRICAL CIRCUITRY AND NOTED THE DANGER OF OVERLOADING THE CIRCUIT WITH THE RISK THAT ALL THE FUSES MIGHT BLOW. HE SAID THAT THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT NEEDED TO HAVE SUFFICIENT TIME TO PERMIT A CONSENSUS OF THE POLITICAL FORCES IN BELGIUM TO EMERGE ON THE SAME SIDE OF A SERIOUS ISSUE. THE RISK IS THAT UNLESS SUCH A CONSENSUS EMERGES FOR COLLOCATION, THE INTERNAL POLITICS IN BELGIUM MIGHT NOT PERMIT A FAVORABLE DECISION. THIS POSSIBILITY IS A
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MATTER OF SERIOUS CONCERN TO THOSE BELGIANS WHO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF COLLOCATION AND WHO ALSO FAVOR OTHER POLITICO-MILITARY SUBJECTS OF INTEREST TO THE USG.

5. WE DISCUSSED THE TIMING AND CONGRESSIONAL PRESENTATION ASPECTS OF THE COLLOCATION PROPOSALS WITH MR. BAL AGAINST THE INFORMATION HE HAD GIVEN US IN PARAS 2-4 ABOVE. HE SAID THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO ESTIMATE WHEN A DECISION ON COLLOCATION MIGHT BE MADE AS HE COULD NOT PREDICT WHEN IMPROVED-HAWK AND THE ER/RB WEAPON QUESTIONS COULD BE RESOLVED. THE DECISIONS ARRIVED AT IN THESE CASES MAY HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE COLLOCATION ISSUE.

6. COMMENT: WE REALIZE THAT THE ABOVE INFORMATION WILL NOT BE REASSURING AND CERTAINLY WILL NOT BE HELPFUL IN REGARDS TO THE TIMING FOR CONGRESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE BELIEVE THAT MR. BAL'S PRESENTATION IS AN ACCURATE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION. WE CONCLUDE THAT IF WE ARE TO HAVE A BETTER CHANCE FOR ULTIMATELY RECEIVING A FAVORABLE BELGIAN REPLY ON COLLOCATION, WE WILL HAVE TO CONTINUE TO EXERCISE PATIENCE. OTHER ASPECTS OF THESE ISSUES WERE RAISED, IN A MORE

GENERAL WAY, IN BRUSSELS 2603 (DTG 101659Z FEB 78) AND
USNATO 1809 (DTG 221812Z FEB 78). CHAMBERS

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